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SUBJECT: FADHILA LEADER JABIRI SAYS JAFARI,S CANDIDACY IS
UNRAVELING

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Fadhila Party leader Nadeem al-Jabiri told the Ambassador March 6 that Ibrahim al-Jafari's candidacy is unraveling inside the Shia Coalition. The Marja'iyah, Jabiri said, have sent strong signals that Jafari should step aside, and Muqtada al-Sadr's supporters are backing away from Jafari. Jabiri lamented that Jafari believes that he has been "mandated by God" to lead the country and that Jafari may be the hardest to convince of the need to step aside. Jabiri urged the Ambassador to be patient as pressure builds on Jafari. If there is no movement in the near future, Jabiri predicted, the emergence of Ayad Allawi as an alternative candidate might prod the Shia Coalition into action. Jabiri said he expects discussions about alternative candidates to increase in the coming days. Jabiri clearly sees his own name near the top of the list for PM. In a March 7 meeting, SCIRI leader Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim told the Ambassador that he is concerned that Kurdish leaders are sending mixed signals and leaving some Shia Coalition members with the impression that the Kurds may be willing to accept Jafari's nomination. END SUMMARY.

Support Diminishing For Jafari Within Shia Coalition

12. (C) Jabiri told the Ambassador March 6 that the Shia Coalition has held two internal sessions since the Kurds, Allawi, and Tawafuq rejected Ibrahim al-Jafari's nomination. Jabiri said that the first session saw an angry backlash from the Da'wa and Da'wa Tanzim al-Iraq parties but surprising silence from Muqtada al-Sadr allies and the independent bloc. By the second session, held March 5, the Sadrists remained silent and even one member of Da'wa Tanzim al-Iraq (National Security Minister Abd al-Kareem al-Anzi) had defected from Jafari's camp. Muqtada al-Sadr's followers are concerned most that Adel Abd al-Mehdi not claim the nomination in the event that Jafari is sidelined, Jabiri said. Jabiri added that, in a recent meeting with Jafari and his aides in Najaf, he understood that the Marja'iyah sent a veiled message that Jafari should step aside.

13. (C) NOTE: In a March 7 meeting, SCIRI leader Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim told the Ambassador that he is concerned that Kurdish leaders are sending mixed signals and leaving some Shia Coalition members with the impression that the Kurds may be willing to accept Jafari's nomination. END NOTE.

Jafari's Delusions of Grandeur

14. (C) Jabiri said he fears that the only real obstacle to putting forward a new candidate will be Jafari himself.

Jafari is still clinging to his position, Jabiri said, and his aides do not appear to be accepting the rising tide of protest swelling around them. Jabiri said he has attempted to broach the subject of stepping down in a private meeting with Jafari but found Jafari totally unwilling to discuss the issue. Jabiri said that Jafari describes himself as "mandated by God and the Ummah (Muslim nation)" to lead Iraq -- self-aggrandizement that Jabiri said is chillingly "Saddamist."

Jabiri Still Sees Himself as Compromise Candidate

15. (C) Jabiri clearly sees himself as the likely compromise candidate in the event that Jafari is pushed aside. He said that even the Muqtada al-Sadr group (his chief rivals for the Sadrism legacy) are now angling to form an alliance with him. Jabiri said that Muqtada al-Sadr supporters confronted him in the earlier phases of the prime ministerial race and threatened to slander him and expose his authorship of an article praising Saddam Hussein. Jabiri said he rejected the threat and told them, "Go ahead." Now that Sadr's supporters have seen that he does not bow to such threats, Jabiri said, the Sadr faction is ready to find ways to work with him. (COMMENT: A smear campaign was launched against Jabiri but does not appear to have significantly dented his position in the Shia coalition -- perhaps because so many members have blemished records after 35 years of Ba'athist rule. END COMMENT.)
KHALILZAD